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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State
Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense
Andrew Card, Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff
Steve Hadley, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
William Burns, American Ambassador to Russia
Thomas Graham, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russian Affairs
Peter Afaneseenko, Interpreter

Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation
Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sergey Kislyak, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sergey Prikhodko, Assistant to the President
Yuri Ushakov, Russian Ambassador to the United States
Igor Neverov, Director of North America Department, MFA
Andrey Tsibenko, Interpreter

DATE, TIME: September 16, 2005, 2:15 - 2:45 p.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Where's the Secretary of State? Is she coming? Oh, there she is. I was just telling Vladimir that I passed a note to Condi during the Security Council session earlier this week. "I have to go to the bathroom. How do I do this?" Now, I know how to go to the bathroom; my mother potty-trained me. But in any event, they took a picture of the note and blew it up and put it in the newspaper. (U)

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Classified by: V. Phillip Lago
Reason: 1.4(b)(d)
Declassify on: 9/20/15

President Putin: That's not right. I was talking with Sergey [Lavrov] about the need to change this. Yours was a personal thing. Suppose it has been something secret? (U)

The President: What if it had been a dirty word? That would have been worse. (U)

Secretary Rumsfeld: What were you supposed to do? Raise your hand and ask for permission? (U)

The President: Vladimir and I had a good conversation: Iran, North Korea, the CIS. On the CIS, we agreed we should have a dialogue, a strategic dialogue, led by the MFA and Bill Burns, I mean Nick Burns, on our side. So everyone can understand what everyone wants, to dispel rumors, to understand strategies and intentions. (S)

President Putin: Precisely. We need better coordination and to avoid contradictions. (U)

The President: We also discussed the WTO. I want to get this done. I've told my people to work as hard as they can so that our bureaucracy can cut deals with Gref. But Gref has to work with his bureaucracy so that he can cut deals. We need to work on banking, civil aviation, and other things. (S)

President Putin: You have better relations with Cuba than you do with us. They're in the WTO. (S)

The President: Not because of us. (U)

President Putin: Yes, this is what you inherited. (U)

The President: We had a good talk about China, a philosophical discussion. But we both have good relations with China. (S)

President Putin: We also discussed Iran. (S)

Foreign Minister Lavrov: We discussed only Iran. (S)

Secretary Rice: Yes, we had a good extensive discussion of Iranian matters while you two were talking. We agree that no one wants Iran to have nuclear weapons and that we need to do everything to avoid nuclear weapons in Iran. Our concern is Iran's ability to reprocess and enrich. It is very important to come to a place where Iran can't enrich or reprocess. That

would be dangerous and could be turned to a military program. We made available to the Russians our briefing on weaponization.

~~(S)~~

President Putin: I've read it. (U)

The President: Vladimir said he wanted to have his experts take a close look to get a sense of the reality of the document. I told Vladimir that is fair. Hadley, can you make that happen?

~~(S)~~

Secretary Rice: We can arrange an exchange of experts. ~~(S)~~

President Putin: This is why George mentioned the need for experts to meet. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Rice: Let me mention one other thing. The Russians believe the time for referral hasn't come. I made the point that it is important that the Iranians paid a price for the way they have acted. The Russians have some creative ideas on how to prevent the Iranians from developing an indigenous enrichment or reprocessing capability. ~~(S)~~

President Putin: Sergey has laid out our idea. Our concern is that immediate referral will lead Iran to take the North Korean route. If they are indeed striving for nuclear weapons, then we will have lost control over what is happening in Iran. Then we need to do something. What? Strike? Who does that? Where? What targets? Are you sure of the information you have? It's important that we build a basis for our position. But I agree with George. If Iran violates international law, as just formulated here, then we have the right to bring this matter to the Security Council. ~~(S)~~

The President: It's not only international law. They've agreed to the Paris Agreement. It makes me nervous when they agree to something and then walk it back. It's their mentality I don't understand, in agreeing to something but not meaning it. We need to get some sense about this. ~~(S)~~

President Putin: We won't be able to read their minds. ~~(S)~~

The President: We don't need to read their minds. We just need to see how they act. Vladimir met with the Iranian president, and he gave me a description of their talks. ~~(S)~~

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President Putin: The agreement you mentioned wasn't an agreement. The Iranians say they took a voluntary step on the moratorium. (S)

The President: That's an interesting question. We believe they made an agreement with the Europeans, and so do the Europeans. They said, "We agree to this." Now they're saying they didn't agree, but the Europeans thought they had. It's hard to fathom the mindset of a country that agrees, and then doesn't mean it agreed. That makes me nervous. We don't have any contact with them, so we have to rely on others to keep the weapons out of their hands. We need to discuss how to achieve this. (S)

President Putin: I had an uneasy conversation with him, lengthy and uneasy. (S)

The President: How long? (U)

President Putin: One hour twenty minutes. I told him if he didn't continue negotiations he would drive his country into a corner and isolate it. How would he get out? (S)

The President: They're testing and probing. They are looking for a weak link. Germany seems to be the weakest link in the EU-3, so they turn there. Then they turn to Russia. I understand they are the new guy on the block, that they have a new government. But it's the same group of unelected mullahs who are making the decisions. He needs to know the parameters he can move around in, or we are going to face a nightmare. The military option stinks, but we can't take it off the table. Sharon is thinking about the military option. If you or I were Sharon, we'd be thinking about the military option. Iranian nukes really scare the Israelis. Diplomacy must work. That's an important point to keep in mind. If Sharon feels he needs to strike Iran, all hell will break loose. I'm not saying it will happen, only that the most likely military reactions will come from Israel. (S)

President Putin: But what will they target? (S)

The President: If they think there's enriching at Natanz, that's one. But we aren't doing the targeting for Israel. (S)

President Putin: But it's not clear what the labs have, where they are. Cooperation with Pakistan still exists. (S)

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The President: I talked to Musharraf about that. I told him we're worried about transfers to Iran and North Korea. They put A.Q. Khan in jail, and some of his buddies. Under house arrest. We want to know what they said. I keep reminding Musharraf of that. Either he's getting nothing or he's not being forthcoming. (S)

President Putin: As far as I understand, they found uranium of Pakistani origin in the centrifuges. (S)

The President: Yes, the stuff the Iranians forgot to tell the IAEA about. That's a violation. (S)

President Putin: It was of Pakistani origin. That makes me nervous. (S)

The President: It makes us nervous, too. (S)

President Putin: Think about us. (U)

The President: We don't need a lot of religious nuts with nuclear weapons. That's what Iran has running the country. (S)

President Putin: I have the sense they have made a decision. I mentioned this to George earlier. They made the point that they want to continue negotiations with the EU-3. That's positive. (S)

The President: We're making progress on safeguarding nuclear sites and in the program to decommission weapons systems. I get pressure from Congress all the time to keep these programs moving forward. (S)

President Putin: We have a simple and clear position. We are ready to continue on a reciprocal basis. When our experts visit American sites, they are brought to a certain point and told they can go no farther. We will reciprocate and decide how far we will allow each other to go. We need to look at this. (S)

The President: Is there a problem, Don? (U)

Secretary Rumsfeld: Not with us. (U)

National Security Advisor Hadley: It's mostly DOE. (U)

Secretary Rumsfeld: We do not make weapons or dismantle them. We just shoot them, or just prepare to shoot them. (S)

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The President: So we need to check with another guy, Bodman.
(U)

Secretary Rice: We are prepared to reciprocate. (U)

The President: We need to have the same standards. (U)

President Putin: I hear you are developing a small nuclear charge. It will always be tempting to use them. (S)

The President: You are accusing us of building small nuclear weapons? (S)

Secretary Rumsfeld: I talked to Sergey Ivanov about this. We are talking about building small nuclear weapons. We are asking Congress for permission to take large dirty weapons and make smaller ones. So many people are doing stuff underground. You can't get them with conventional weapons. But we haven't gotten Congress to agree. (S)

The President: Rumsfeld just gave away all our secrets. (S)

President Putin: I read all those secrets on the Internet. I also read how to make an A-bomb. (S)

The President: We need to keep quiet. (U)

President Putin: The ways and means of using these nuclear arms changes the psychology of countries with nuclear weapons. Their use becomes possible, and if it's just a little smaller or a little larger, who will care? That makes a difference. (S)

Secretary Rumsfeld: You have made the same argument on small nuclear weapons that Ted Kennedy makes. (S)

The President: That's about as big an insult as we can make. Should we discuss North Korea? Our position is simple: No light water reactor, period. If we stay together, we can get the deal done. China understands and accepts our position. So does Japan. You can't succeed in negotiations if you are negotiating with yourself. If they get the same message, that will be good. Otherwise, nothing will get done. (S)

President Putin: Our positions coincide. The North Koreans huff and puff, they walk in and out, but our positions are the same and we don't want any dents in it. (S)

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The President: It's just a matter of time. Their economy is falling apart. (S)

President Putin: They are putting together an economic reform program, along the Chinese model. (S)

The President: They've put together ten reform programs, and it's getting worse and worse. I feel sorry for the people of North Korea. They are starving people to death. It's pathetic, pathetic, extremely sad. They're isolated. (S)

President Putin: When I visited North Korea, on the way back even the security guards said they never wanted to go there again. (S)

The President: I bet even some of the North Korean guards wanted to take off with you to get to the promised land. (S)

President Putin: No, they didn't. There may be a lot of nuts there, but not everyone is. I used to be a member of the Communist Party. I believed in the ideas of communism. I was prepared to die for them. It's a long road to inner transformation. People are limited to the cubicle they live in. And many are sincere in what they believe. The North Koreans live in more seclusion than we lived in. They are more isolated than the Soviet Union was under Stalin. The overwhelming number are prepared to die. This is not East Europe or East Germany. For any serious change in mindset, there needs to be rapprochement between the North and South. (S)

The President: That's right. (U)

President Putin: When I first visited Israel, it was quite a revelation. I was told it's a hostile country, and what I saw was totally different. It takes time. The people in the North need to see what is happening in the South. That will make a difference. We need to engage them in negotiations in this light. (S)

The President: Agree. I recommend you read this book on Alexander II. It's a good book. Who's the author? (U)

Secretary Rice: Radzhinsky. (U)

President Putin: Yes, he's a good storyteller. (U)

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The President: It's a really good book. (U)

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Just one last thing, we have a joint report on the new Checklist. (U)

The President: We have to check off on the new Checklist? Okay. (U)

President Putin: Fine. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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